

TRANSCRIPT OF A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD BY THE
PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AFTER THE
RESULTS OF THE 1976 GENERAL ELECTIONS AT THE
SINGAPORE POLYTECHNIC, ON 24 DECEMBER, 1976

PRIME MINISTER: Well, good morning, gentleman,

Sorry, it took a long time to count the last votes in
Kampong Ubi.

You know that the percentage works out now to 72.4%
or 72½ % roughly for the PAP this time as against 60% the last time.

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This time, we gave notice of early elections in
September when we announced that we will not hold a by-election in Sepoy
Lines because we are going to hold general elections in a matter of months. We
had all the election registers in a matter of months. We had all the election
registers open for inspection. They had all the assurances they wanted as the
vote was secret. So there are alibis. I take this as an endorsement of our

policy on National Service, on our policy of pro-communist detainees, on our policies for economic and social adjustments in Singapore.

One thing which has been significant was that those constituencies which are less privileged are the ones that have increased their votes for us. In other words, if people believe that we have moved away -- some commentators have indicated we have represented the employers. It is not reflected in the votes. It is the underprivileged who have given us more solid support and accounted for the increase in the overall percentage of votes.

Now, over to you. Any questions.

QUESTION: Sir, in your statement, you said that you support -- continue the present policies, you propose to do for the poor. Do you say, apart from housing development and urban renewal ...?

PRIME MINISTER: It means jobs, it means training for jobs. And it doesn't mean giving things for free because that was another election issue. And the poor knows that you don't get manna falling from heaven, not in Singapore anyway.

QUESTION: Will there be other priorities?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, indeed.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, I am from the American Broadcasting Company, ABC. May I take this opportunity to congratulate you of your great success. I personally think I voice the people of America's views when I say that you are like George Washington, the father of your country. And tonight, must be a great night. I understand you got 89% of the votes in your constituency. Am I correct?

PRIME MINISTER: I think that is about right.

ABC: Against 84% in 1972?

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PRIME MINISTER: Well, I wouldn't like to be compared to George Washington. I think it is unbecoming for me to think in those terms. But we try and do our best. And that's why we are here.

QUESTION: How do you read the percentage of these votes?

PRIME MINISTER: How do I read? I read it as 72.4% compared to 69.

QUESTION: What I mean to say is that your Foreign Minister had said it before -- during the elections -- that if the PAP gets -- if the Opposition gets about 30% of the votes that would mean that the PAP was found wanting.

Do you agree with it?

PRIME MINISTER: I don't think he ever said anything of that sort. He is a very experienced journalist before he became an active politician, and no experienced journalist will ever say that, "If you don't get an increase in votes from 69% to more than 69%, therefore it is a failure of policies." In a free and open secret vote -- or rather (sorry) in a secret vote, any government that can obtain more than 50% can be reasonably satisfied. In fact, many governments today whether it is in Japan, whether it is in Italy, and I believe the British

Government itself is in on a minority vote. So what he might have said, which you may have misconstrued is that any decrease from 30% of the vote which did not come to us would be a solid endorsement of our policies and, if I may add, it debunks the rather pompous, pontificating done by some wiseacres who write in our Singapore journals or even better still, believe that they are telling the world all about Singapore in foreign journals. They are wrong. They don't know

Singapore. That's why they are commentators and that's why we are entrusted with the business of government.

Can I ask what press you represent?

ANSWER: I represent the National Iranian Radio and Television.

PRIME MINISTER: Ah, well, we are friends!

QUESTION: Sir, this 72.5% means that the protest votes have gone down tremendously?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I don't think ... You know, we shouldn't get trapped in phases like 'protest votes'. There is a hard-core of anywhere between 10% to 12% which are anti-votes. They are anti-any government other than a communist government. I would put it around that figure -- hard-core. The rest are just dissatisfied with various policies which may have affected them or licences which they may not have got, permits for members of the family they want to bring into Singapore and so on and so forth. You can call it a form of protest, you can call it a form of disapproval, but you must clearly differentiate in your mind that no amount of magic will make that solid hard-core of pro-

communist votes disappear. That is not a protest. And you will notice in some of those areas where the Barisan, in those halcyon days, when they were running wild around Singapore and the communist united front, these were the areas where the spoilt votes are still high. They do not even want to protest by voting for the Opposition. They protest by spoiling the vote. That is a very interesting study in psephology, Singapore's psephology.

QUESTION: In tonight's voting, the spoilt votes have been unusually high, reaching as far as nearly 500. In the past, it had been 5 to 10 ... attribute it to, is it the same reason? Is that the same reason that you have spoken about?

PRIME MINISTER: I didn't follow the first part of the question.

QUESTION: The protest votes in tonight's ...

PRIME MINISTER: No, I said already let's not just coin it -- "protest votes".

QUESTION: The rejected votes have been unusually high tonight, ranging from 3 to about 500. Whereas in past elections, they have been about 5 to 10 ... What do you attribute that to?

PRIME MINISTER: I think those who totally reject the system and do not want to use an opposition candidate to register his disapproval. He rejects the system in toto and can't bring himself to work the system. They are not illiterate, you know. Some of them write on the ballot paper -- quite scurrilous remarks. But that's for them.

Nobody from the Far Eastern Economic Review?

QUESTION: In Malay.

ANSWER: In Malay.

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QUESTION: In the night after the last elections, you made some very interesting reflections, Mr. Prime Minister, on the sort of creating an opposition. Would you have some more thoughts on this, this night? I have one question to this. Of course, you couldn't campaign for opposition candidates. But isn't it a little of a pity that not at least one or two got through so that for

Singapore's international dimension ... I mean, I would say -- well, you got some opposition candidates ...

PRIME MINISTER: May I ask before you go ...

Are you suggesting that because we did not have any opposition candidate which the people thought worthy of being a representative of any one of the constituencies, therefore it is not democratic?

QUESTION: No, definitely not.

PRIME MINISTER: Thank you very much. I think that must be established first.

QUESTION: I am suggesting that it is easier to get Singapore's story across ... If you read the ...

PRIME MINISTER: No, don't you think it is a much more unusual story that the opposition was not able to put up anybody in any constituency where the people thought the candidate worthy of support?

QUESTION: That is quite right.

I think that is a much better story, a more unusual story. But Singapore's elections -- in Europe -- you get five lines ...

PRIME MINISTER: No, that doesn't worry me at all. All the European embassies are here. The ambassadors are here. They are gentlemen, like you - wise, knowledgeable, extremely perceptive, and when Christmas is over you can write some deep 'think' pieces, in-depth analysis. But tonight, nearly three o'clock, in the morning, sorry, 3.20 a.m. You want me to start philosophising on the political systems of government, I think is asking too much.

QUESTION: Sir, last night you mentioned that communist threat ...
Would you say that in dealing with this threat it will be necessary to increase
defence expenditure?

PRIME MINISTER: I would hope not. I think we have probably reached a plateau. We have peaked in our defence expenditure and have now levelled down to a plateau and if things do not go badly in Thailand, particularly the border between Thailand and Malaysia, I see no reason at all why we should be spending more on defence. But I see no reason -- or I see no way in which how

we can abandon or reduce our defence expenditure. As a percentage of our GDP, it will probably have to go on at about 4%, 5%.

QUESTION: Sir, would you say most of the anti-government votes are from pro-communist supporters?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I have explained it just now that there is a hard rock of 10% to 12%, maybe 15% of pro-communist types. That is my guess. Judging from the way it gradually shrunk and the fact that they have not been able to recruit. If they were all pro-communist supporters, I would be quite disturbed because that means there are some 28%. That is a bit on the high side.

The foreign correspondents are unusually polite this evening or this morning. They usually have given me quite a hilarious time.

QUESTION: Sir, do you like to comment on the narrow margin ...?

PRIME MINISTER: You are from?

QUESTION: From New Nation.

PRIME MINISTER: You see, I want to give the foreign correspondents a chance, I mean, this was a night they were waiting for. They had their knives out, their sticks out. No, no, I don't mean, American Broadcasting Corporation, but quite a few of them have been writing predictions of what's going to happen, and it hasn't happen. And I thought we will have a bit of light relief for the evening.

(No, no, you are a philosopher.)

QUESTION: But now I am asking quite an unphilisophical question. Since you are asking for some ...

PRIME MINISTER: No, I want the gentlemen who have been writing forecasts of how we are going to get a beating.

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QUESTION: Can't you do away with those numbers on the ballot sheets -- to do away with this talk?

PRIME MINISTER: Do you want people to go and stuff ballot boxes? Once you do away with those numbers, any government that's dishonest can just stuff them in. No, this is exactly the system which the British run. For God's

sake, we have been through all this. And the opposition this time quoted me as further reassurance that the laws guaranteed secrecy. So they have no alibi. They just don't measure up.

Well, one last one.

QUESTION: Sir, various correspondents have been coming here for the past many years and who have covered the 1972 elections tell me that during last elections, the enthusiasm in opposition camp has not been as much as it has been seen this time. But again ...

PRIME MINISTER: Have you followed the election campaigns in many parts of the world or in this part of the world? The fact that you have got a few activists going to the same meetings and working up steam, doesn't mean you've got votes. It's when you open the ballot boxes that you know whether the steam that you have generated has warmed anybody's hearts.

One last one.

QUESTION: Do you propose to reshuffle the Cabinet or make new appointments?

PRIME MINISTER: I propose to have a good sleep and I'll think about the future when I have recovered from the rigours of this campaign.

Thank you.

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